Phone 'Hate' Message Originator Fights Exposure of Co-Sponsors

By Robert C. Albright
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A slight, intense Sarasota, Fla., physician took sole responsibility yesterday for the flood of anonymous alleged "hate" messages automatically flooding some 60 communities via telephone recording devices.

Dr. William Campbell Douglass, a member of the John Birch Society and president of the right-wing organization Let Freedom Ring told a Senate Commerce subcommittee he is willing to insert his name in each of the hitherto anonymous telephone tapes.

But he strenuously objected to legislative and phone company moves to reveal names and addresses of local telephone subscribers whose taped voices repeat his message when advertised numbers are dialed.

'Exposed to Crackpots'

"They would be harassed and exposed to crackpots," Douglass protested.

Sen. John O. Pastore (D-R.I.) broke in with a smile: "There is a difference of opinion about who are the crackpots."

The subcommittee heard Douglass through before concluding two days of hearings on bills by Sens. Gale W. McGee (D-Wyo.) and Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) to end the anonymity of such calls. Both bills carefully guard against disturbing free-speech guarantees.

Douglass opposed both bills. He objected as well to proposals by AT&T to give out as promptly as possible the names and addresses of subscribers to the automatic announcement service of all Bell System companies.

"Clearly the names of our sponsors should be available on court order only," Douglass said. "I think legislation should be passed to forbid AT&T from releasing the names. It is invasion of privacy."

He went on to predict that Let Freedom Ring will continue to operate "even if restrictive legislation is passed."

"We have been slandered from coast to coast by every newspaper in this country," he said, "but no one has attempted to sue us because we told the truth."

Pastore quoted one message describing Gen. Eisenhower as "one of the greatest phonies ever put over on the American people." It said his book, "Crusade in Europe," was "ghost-written by a Communist agent." The message also described Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the United States, as a "pro-Communist."

Pastore then asked the witness: "Who said that?"

"I said that," acknowledged Douglass. "I'm about the most un-anonymous person around here."

Filing of Scripts

McGee asked Douglass if he would file his scripts if required to do so. Douglass said he would be happy to file them, providing his local sponsors were not "exposed." He said some of them already have been fired from their jobs when their employers learned what they did.

McGee bore down acidly on Douglass's "concern" for his sponsors. Then the Wyoming

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'Hate' Call Exposure Is Fought

Democrat told of an anonymous phone call he said he personally received after introducing his bill to knock the anonymity out of automated phone calls.

According to McGee, the unidentified voice told him "We already have let enough blood in this country, and it's time we let some of yours."

"Assuming this woman was serious," McGee told the witness, "my life is in jeopardy."

Expresses Disapproval

"I do not approve of anyone making threatening calls to you or anyone else," replied Douglass.

"Have you ever said anything nice about anybody?" Pastore asked Douglass.

"Yes," replied the witness. "Gen. MacArthur and J. Edgar Hoover, and they are not all. We might even say something nice about you."

The subcommittee also heard from Sen. Javits and other witnesses proposing measures to cope with anonymous, automatic phone calls.

Marvin Berger, representing the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, indorsed the Javits and McGee bills and a House bill by Rep. Benjamin S. Rosenthal (D-N.Y.). The Rosenthal bill requires preservation of tapes used in automatic recordings.

William C. Mott, vice president of the United States Independent Telephone Association, said he believed corrective measures taken "at the local level" will suffice.

Bruce L. Felknor, director of the Fair Campaign Practices Committee, testified that steps taken by the Bell Telephone companies to inhibit anonimity may make legislation unnecessary.